

PIHA CAFÉ

By Graham Hepburn

Piha Café

A combination of traditional looks and new technology means the Piha Café sits comfortably within its seaside environment and, more importantly, will be kind to it. The wooden homestead-like structure of the café has been designed so that the timber will silver off over time. It's tucked back against the hill on its northern side to give it a sense of nestling on the site. Being set back from the road not only allows visitors a feeling of arrival as they approach but also serves the more pragmatic purpose of creating room for a car park.

smallest details to minimise the building's impact: the toilets are low-flush, the taps are triggered by sensors and there are even sensors on the hallway lights to the toilets. The building has been insulated to the latest standards and the windows are double glazed. On cold winter days, extra warmth is pro-

The café uses photovoltaic cells in flexible panels laid directly on to the north face of the ColorSteel roof to harness energy that helps to drive the heat pumps that warm the concrete floor of the cafe and provide its hot water.

"We basically get free heat and free hot water," says Andy Higgs, one of four owners along with Richard Hatton, Christian Fougere and David Bensley, who drove the build as project manager.

"If Dave hadn't come on board it would have been a disaster without him," says Andy.

The café also has an inverter so it can export any excess power back to the grid. "It's behind the walls where people usually cut costs, but that's where we've put in the investment," says Andy. "The payoff is lower impact on the environment and lower running costs."

And it's not just behind the walls where they've spent money; a fair bit has gone underground with an 87m deep bore supplying fresh drinking water, or "Piha pure" as Andy calls it.

There is also a sophisticated on-site wastewater treatment set-up, which actually sits under the carpark. The carpark itself is grassed to provide a permeable surface that won't create stormwater runoff. The grass is laid over Permathene Turfpave grass pavers, made from 100% recycled polypropylene, which help the grass to withstand traffic. Beneath the car-



park Andy says there is a 80m long network of 2m deep scoria trenches that can cope with up to 3000 litres of wastewater a day. "By the time the wastewater gets to the end of that it's pretty much drinkable," he says.

There has also been a conscious effort to avoid using paints, sealers or stains as much as possible. Andy says the macrocarpa and Japanese cedar in the building don't require finishing to withstand the elements and will age beautifully. Attention has been paid to the

vided by a retro-looking but highly efficient low emission burner, called an Oh-Ah. Skylights are used on the southern side of the roof to flood the café with light but not on the northern side as the direct sunlight would have been too harsh.





"The really innovative thing about this is where we've used technology we've used the latest greatest things but where we haven't had to we've gone secondhand," says Andy.

Some appliances have been sourced from other cafes as have the tables and chairs. And there's a fair assortment of rescued items from demolition yards and secondhand stores such as the light fittings, toilet doors, and packing crates under the counter. Andy says the takeaway bar on the eastern side of the building could have had nice modern lines but instead they chose to use a 5m wide slab of macrocarpa for the bench to give the area warmth and character.

Architect Nick Dalton says the building had to be modest because planning rules dictated the site coverage of the café and the number of seats it was allowed. But carrying off that look wasn't as easy as it might seem.

"It just looks like a really simple box but it's deceptively complex to do it well," says Nick. "It's got all the bells and whistles but we didn't want it to look like it's got all the bells and whistles."



He says the building's simple lines and easy flow can be attributed to hammering out every detail beforehand and then leaving it to the craftsmanship of people like head builder Duncan Clarke, of Coastal Construction, and Derek Mullooly, of New Zealand Log Homes. Features such as a seamless threshold are difficult to achieve but look elegant and make it easier for customers coming and going as well as providing a sense of openness, especially when the glass doors slide backwards from the southwest corner to embrace the view of Lion Rock. The deck on this corner also has a hidden fixing system, meaning no nails and this gives the wide eucalypt boards a look that is flawless and flowing.

Andy laughs when he recalls how he was tempted by the offer of some free roofing in a sandy colour but Nick wouldn't have anything to do

with it. Nick was adamant they had to go with a silvery grey colour to blend with the environment. The colour and the clean, simple lines of the Euroline SeamLok complement the building's form. As Nick says, "It was really important that the roof looked right as the whole building is supposed to silver off over time so it will look like it's always been there."

While the café is now up and running, Andy says it's been a tough and costly battle for him and his fellow owners to get it off the ground after fighting local opposition through hearings at the Waitakere City Council and then in the Environment Court.

That process took almost three years and cost hundreds of thousands of dollars but there has been an upside.



Above: Innovation in water dispensing, historic post office memorabilia, and even the worms recycle the restaurant waste in the on site worm farm.

Right: The water heating system and the electrical system, powered by the solar panels, work in tandem.

Harley Dalton Ltd

Harley Dalton Ltd was established in 2006 by husband and wife team Anna Harley and Nicholas Dalton. Both graduates from Auckland University Architecture School, Anna and Nicholas have received



"All the local tradesmen have pitched in and cut their rates or done us a good deal because of the battle we've had and because they've believed in the project," Andy says.

"Mind you, if we hadn't spent two-and-a-half years in the courts we wouldn't have got that sort of support."

Nick says the irony is that people who opposed the café on the grounds that it would ruin the area were conveniently overlooking Piha's history.

He says research showed that in recent times Piha had been a vibrant seaside community with a movie theatre and milk bars.

"So when people who opposed the café say they want to preserve the heritage of the area, what heritage are they talking about?" says Nick. But with that battle fought and won, one of the nicest touches in the café is that it still has some of the old post boxes from the post office that used to be on the site.

Andy says the idea is that regulars can keep their coffee cups in them or people can leave keys there or messages for friends.

As Nick says, "That was a really important thing for us because it had been the site of the old post office and we wanted to keep that sense of community."

national and international design awards for innovation in architecture and urban design. Their experience is diverse, taking in hospitality related, residential and urban design projects include converting a 100-year-old derelict church into an apartment in South island, a stunning house in Blenheim overlooking the Dryhills vineyards, and a state of the art dental surgery in Tokyo. HarleyDalton is an energetic inner city practice which is committed to the continuing evolution of urban culture in Auckland. Nicholas and Anna pride themselves on working closely with their clients to produce enduring designs.

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